

REMARKS BY

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**2013 RECIPIENT OF
THE UNITED STATES EMBASSY NASSAU**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD

**AWARD CEREMONY
NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS
15 MARCH 2013**

Member of Parliament and Deputy Leader of the Free National Movement, Mrs. Loretta Butler Turner, Chargé d’Affaires John Dinkleman of the United States Embassy, former Bahamas recipients of the United States Embassy, Nassau’s International Women of Courage Award, Mrs. Janet Bostwick and Dr Sandra Dean Patterson, Senior Public Officers, Friends: Good Morning.

I am deeply honoured to receive the 2013 United States Embassy, Nassau’s International Women of Courage Award, and to have been nominated for the Secretary of State’s ***International Woman of Courage Award***. This nomination means so much to me, because it counts me among women from around the world whose commitment and stance in national and international life, has earned them recognition as women of exceptional courage and leadership, in human rights, women’s equality, and social progress. Chargé d’Affaires John Dinkleman, I sincerely thank you and officials of Embassy.

In 2006, I reserved a website domain for commentary on international affairs, and The Bahamas’ participation in this area. The domain name is “[*TheBahamasbeyondourborders*](#)”. The logo for the website depicts a woman carrying a basket on her head, in much the same way as my grandmother and mother carried heavy loads on their heads, from wood for the fire, to produce from the fields. In the woman’s basket is a globe.

The website and logo express my conviction that in this globalized world, The Bahamas national interest does not stop at its borders, but extends to developments worldwide, obliging us to put our best foot forward in the international arena. The woman with the globe in her basket confirms what is common knowledge - women not only hold up half the sky; they also help to carry the weight of the world. I hope to launch my website shortly.

As a true pioneer Bahamas diplomatic and consular officer, and international organization official, senior public officer, expert, consultant, public speaker and author, my work has taken me, as is said, “***around the world and back***”. I am, however, a true believer that wherever you go, you should remember where you came from, and the people and circumstances that have significantly influenced who you are, what you believe in, what you do, and how you do it.

I was firstly influenced by the Bain Town community, where I was born and brought up. The names of the most of the women of Bain Town would not be found in the headlines of their day, or in the history books of The Bahamas. Most were illiterate or semi-literate; but they counted in that critical mass of strong Bahamian women that were agents of change in our country, true believers in core values including loyalty to family, community and country. My mother, Effie LaFleur Sherman, was one of these women. Together with my father, John Alfred Sherman Sr., she ingrained a simple principle in the consciousness of her sixteen children, which today is still my mantra, “***Make your life count***”.

As a mother of two very young children, my life was significantly influenced by the confidence placed in me by the late Paul Lawrence Adderley, a remarkable Bahamian patriot and nation builder. Minister of Foreign Affairs Paul Adderley set me on the path of diplomacy and international affairs, and gave me his unequivocal support. He was a mentor that placed no limitations on me, but made it clear that he expected me to rise to every challenge. Until today, I carry a sense of obligation to him to strive and to achieve.

Internationally, my life was significantly influenced by the first office I held in the United Nations General Assembly - Rapporteur of the Working Group of the Third Committee to finalize the *Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women*. This early experience opened my eyes to the injustice to which women can be subjected in countries around the world, including my own, in constitutions, in the law, in customs and traditions, in the workplace and in the home.

Service, they say, is a privilege, and I take it as such. I was driven by my early experiences to serve, to step out and make a difference, and to make my life count. In the personal Mission and Agenda to which I committed, service to others, principles, professionalism, self-motivation, team work and hard work, have pride of place. There is no room for limitations on what I could do for my country and internationally, because I was a woman. I am, however, and remain, passionate about upholding the rights of women. I am committed to doing my part to close the gap between the ratification of treaties on women's rights, and the implementation of those treaties; between laws guaranteeing women's rights, and the enforcement of those laws.

Never would I accept that there are gender based "*blackout areas*" in national or international life. Therefore, I did not hesitate in taking up the challenge to serve nationally and internationally in the area of crime prevention and criminal justice, then considered a "*non-traditional*" area of diplomacy for women. I was barely in my thirties when I became one of three women Heads of Delegation in the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. When I revisit my decade of work in the Commission, I reflect with pride on negotiating the General Assembly resolution entitled "*International Campaign against Traffic in Drugs*" on behalf of The Bahamas with United States Congressman Ben Gilman. This resolution became the chapeaux for significant United Nations initiatives, including the 1987 World Conference on Drugs, and the *1988 United Nations Convention against Trafficking in Drugs*.

I can say with confidence that commitment and dedication to service takes you places. For me, the landmark places to which they took me included the Commonwealth Secretariat in London, where the service I rendered included elections observation in countries as far away as Bangladesh and Pakistan, participation in conflict mediation in the Pacific, and a review refugee matters in Africa. They took me into the inner working and management of the United Nations General Assembly, as Chef de Cabinet to the President of the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Accompanying the President, as I earlier accompanied the Commonwealth Secretary General, I was privileged to sit in audiences with world leaders from every continent, including Pope John Paul II and President George Bush of the United States.

I had the honour to serve for some four years as Chair of the Consultative Committee on the United Nations Development Fund for Women, and as The Bahamas Representative on the Commission on the Status of Women, and consultant in women's affairs, including on Gender and the United Nations Secretary General's Agenda for Peace. I was passionate about this service, which reflected my determination to do all I could to uphold the rights of women.

More recently, I was privileged to Chair the Inter-Ministry Committee on Trafficking in Persons, the *TIP Committee*. So much about trafficking in persons is incomprehensible, particularly from the viewpoint of women and girls. It is, for example, incomprehensible that in the 21st Century, people will be sold, forced into prostitution, be forced to work without pay, and be trafficked for body parts, and that other people, traffickers in human lives, would profit from this exploitation.

My leadership of *TIP Committee* and contribution to the work of the Trafficking in Persons Task Force was therefore driven by a sense of obligation to contribute to upholding the *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children*, and enforcing The Bahamas *Trafficking in Persons (Prevention and Suppression) Act 2008*. I am satisfied with the proactive stance The Bahamas is taking against the crime of trafficking in persons now must continue to focus not just on problems, but on solutions. I am also satisfied with what has been accomplished under my leadership must augur well for the future.

It is said that no personal accomplishment is a singular performance, and my accomplishments are no exception. In my more than four decades in diplomacy and public service, I have come to value cooperation with United States Government officials at all levels, over a broad range of issues, in regional, hemispheric and international organizations. It is an honour for me that years of my participation in twenty-four sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, as Representative of The Bahamas, the Commonwealth, and as Chef de Cabinet, included those in which the United States was represented by distinguished women Ambassadors Jean Kirkpatrick and Madeline Albright. I will always be appreciative all those with whom I have worked in the mutual interest of our countries and of the international community.

I am appreciative for the cooperation and support I have received from women of distinction from all walks of life here in The Bahamas, including Janet Bostwick and Dr Dean Patterson, and in countries around the world, and other high-level officials and colleagues of Governments and international organizations with whom I have cooperated to accomplish common global objectives. I extend heartfelt appreciation to the representatives of the *TIP Committee* and *TIP Task Force* for their dedication, hard work and support in the ongoing work to counter trafficking in persons. I thank my son, Sebastian Augustine and my daughter, Senaka Akaibi for their love and support and for being my fiercest and most effective critics.

I especially thank the Government and people of The Bahamas for confidence placed in me over the years to work in the national interest of our country, in solidarity with the international community, and in the Public Service.

The lessons I have learned over the course of a life and career, given powerful impetus by a personal mission and personal agenda, abound. I commend them the next generation of Bahamians, and to the young women with us today from Queens College Temple Christian, already ambassadors and pioneers in their own right. The one lesson that is pivotal to me is that you will not always experience the world at its best; but if you do your best, and dedicate yourself to making a difference in the lives of others, you will, in my mother's words, "*Make your life count*".

I have endeavoured to make my life count, and this is the perspective from which I view receipt of this *International Woman of Courage Award*, for which I will be forever grateful. This accomplishment will surely have its place in the autobiography I am writing on my life and work in diplomacy and public service, entitled, *Patriotism, Nation Building and other Paradoxes*.

I thank you